

Public Outreach Program

As part of the RWSP mandates, the I/I program has surveyed the general public each year to learn what residents know and understand about I/I in their communities; and in some cases specifically what residents learned about I/I as a result of having a pilot I/I reduction rehabilitation or replacement project constructed in their neighborhood. Local agencies and King County will use this information to develop materials to help explain what residents can do on their own properties to reduce private property I/I flows into their local systems. It is important that the local agencies are involved in this effort as some cities and agencies have very specific guidelines or ordinances on what can be done with downspouts and stormwater coming from private property.

5.1 Summary

In autumn 2000, King County conducted a small public opinion survey concerning water quality¹ that asked two I/I-related questions. Results from this survey and from four focus groups conducted by the I/I program consultant team in autumn 2001 showed that the average citizen has little or no knowledge about I/I issues. Accordingly, the I/I program should not be undertaken in 2002 but rather after completion of rehabilitation pilot projects in 2004. In the interim period, the County's program Web site contained general information about the I/I program and, in 2003, residents and businesses within I/I pilot rehabilitation project areas received project-specific information.

In autumn 2003 as a part of King County's water quality survey, residents were asked where their home down spouts connected.² Following completion of the pilot projects, a telephone survey of residents was conducted in November 2004. This telephone survey was the largest public opinion gathering effort completely focused on I/I. The purpose of this survey was to investigate homeowner opinion on possible solutions to the problem of clean water infiltration of the sewer system.

5.2 Results of 2000–2004 Surveys

2000-2001: With very few exceptions, participants in the 2000 telephone survey and the 2001 focus groups were initially unaware of any problems caused by I/I. Once informed, many expressed skepticism about the seriousness of problems and asked how anyone could be sure of something they could not see.

¹ King County Department of Natural Resources, *Fall 2000 Public Survey*.

² King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks, *2003 Water Quality Survey*.

While most homeowners acknowledged their responsibility to fix anything within their property limits, they seemed unwilling to pay for the work unless they were mandated to do so or could visually see proof of the problems. Participants preferred easier inflow reduction steps to those that involved infiltration and pipe replacement. They also felt that the public system should be fixed before private property concerns were addressed.

All four focus groups agreed about the need to educate the public about I/I problems. They suggested that before the public could support an I/I reduction program, they would have to be educated about the actual cost of conveying and treating wastewater and stormwater, the conveyance and treatment capacity that wet weather I/I requires in the system, and methods of correcting the problem. The focus groups wanted positive messages and said the messages must be credible and understandable in order to have an effect on the public.

2003: Results showed that half (50%) of residents said they channel runoff from rain into their yards, 21% connect their down spouts directly to the sewer, and 13% discharge into the street. Most residents (61%) are likely to pay for repairing or replacing the sewer line that serves their property if it is faulty. Three respondents in four indicated that they were unaware of I/I entering local agency systems from private property sources.

2004: Between November 14 and 18, 2004, 400 telephone interviews were conducted with homeowners within the regional wastewater treatment area plus an additional 100 interviews within three pilot project areas: the City of Kent, Skyway Water and Sewer District, and Ronald Wastewater District. Full survey results and detailed findings comparing regional differences plus countywide and pilot area differences are in *Appendix A7*. The report highlights the following six points:

1. Homeowners support spending on the program

A strong majority of residents in the wastewater service area (63%) and the pilot project areas (70%) support their sewer provider spending money on programs to reduce the amount of clean water that gets into sewer lines.

2. A supermajority of homeowners say they are willing to pay an additional \$1.00 per month to help reduce I/I.

Well over three-quarters (83%) of homeowners in the service area and three-quarters (76%) of homeowners in the pilot project areas say they would pay an additional \$1.00 per month to help pay to reduce the amount of clean water going into the sewer lines.

3. Homeowners are divided over who should pay for main line repairs, but a majority feel costs should be shared in some way.

Two-thirds (65%) of residents support sharing the costs of repairs across the service area. Residents are divided, however, on where the bulk of the share should fall. A third (35%) say costs should be shared equally across the service area, a third (30%) think customers in districts where the problems occur should pay more, and nearly a quarter (22%) think customers in the district where there is a problem should pay 100% of the costs.

4. A majority of homeowners think the property owner should pay the total cost for side sewer repairs.

A majority (54%) of residents think property owners should pay the full cost of side sewer repairs. This is divided between a third (33%) who think residents should have access to low interest loans, while 21% think that property owners should find their own means to pay 100% of costs. Forty-two percent think these costs should be shared across the service area.

5. Homeowners are divided over who should pay for land repairs resulting from side sewer work on private property, but homeowners agree that property owners should share some of the burden.

Residents are divided with a third (31%) saying that property owners should pay 100% and slightly more than a third (37%) saying the costs should be shared, either in the local sewer district (13%) or across the regional district (24%).

6. Many homeowners think fixing I/I problems should be mandatory. Half of the homeowners think it should be the owner's decision whether or not to disconnect roof drains on private property.

Half (52%) of homeowners think property owners should be required to fix I/I in side sewers. At the same time, half (49%) think property owners should decide whether to disconnect their roof drains from the sewer system.

Local Survey: In early 2004, the Ronald Wastewater District conducted a survey of residents within its I/I reduction pilot project area. The survey focused on gathering opinions about all phases of the District's pilot project (planning through construction). The district received a 32% response rate from 264 mailings. More than 50% were satisfied or very satisfied that the District's public meetings conveyed the project description and were held at a convenient time and location. More than 73% were satisfied or very satisfied that the work was completed promptly, the contractor was responsive to them, and that they understood the type of work to be performed. And 84% thought that the disturbance level was reasonable during construction.

5.3 Pilot Project Public Information Efforts

In 2003, 10 pilot projects were done to evaluate the effectiveness of various I/I rehabilitation techniques and to document the effectiveness in reducing excessive I/I flows. Several pilot projects were done on private property. To help explain the I/I projects to residents and business owners, several outreach efforts were used.

In some areas meetings were held to provide information. Both photographs and videos were used to show residents the potential impacts from various I/I rehabilitation techniques. At the Ronald and Skyway open houses, district staff collected signed rights-of-entry for private properties. More than 2,500 households and businesses received by mail or hand-delivery project-specific notices with County and agency contact information regarding the work. More

detailed information was sent to more than 550 private property owners where rehabilitation work was undertaken.

The County expanded its program Web site to include highlights for each project and a direct link to local agency Web sites. During construction, several project information signs were installed in each pilot area. In addition to the local agency and County insignias, the signs included a 24-hour message number that immediately paged a County project manager. This instant contact provided residents with direct 24-hour access to project managers who could help answer questions, listen to concerns, or help with emergencies.

The experiences gained from the pilot project information effort demonstrates that direct communication with residents about I/I rehabilitation projects generates support and cooperation from residents. Direct public information efforts will need to be an important part of any recommended I/I program because a majority of I/I comes from private property.